DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 929 UD 021 293

AUTHOR	Mangum, Margaret
TITLE	Face to Face: Introduction to the People and History of Haiti. LIRS Manual for Sponsors of Refugees.
INSTITUTION	Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of State, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	81
NOTE	17p.; For related documents, see UD 021 294-295. Photographs may not reproduce clearly. Not available in paper copy due to institution's restriction.
AVAILABLE FROM	Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, 360 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010 ($1.00).
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cultural Background; Economic Factors; *Haitians; Latin American Culture; Latin American History; Political Influences; *Refugees; Religious Factors
IDENTIFIERS	Haiti

ABSTRACT

This manual was prepared for sponsors of Haitian refugees. The manual attempts to describe the background of refugees from Haiti by briefly explaining their history, culture, religion, politics, economics, customs, and habits. (MK)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

MAR 5 1981

Face to Face:

Introduction to the People and History of Haiti

ED202929

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lily R. Wu
LIRS

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

LIRS Manual for Sponsors of Refugees

FOREWORD

"There go the ships . . ." is a phrase from Psalm 104.

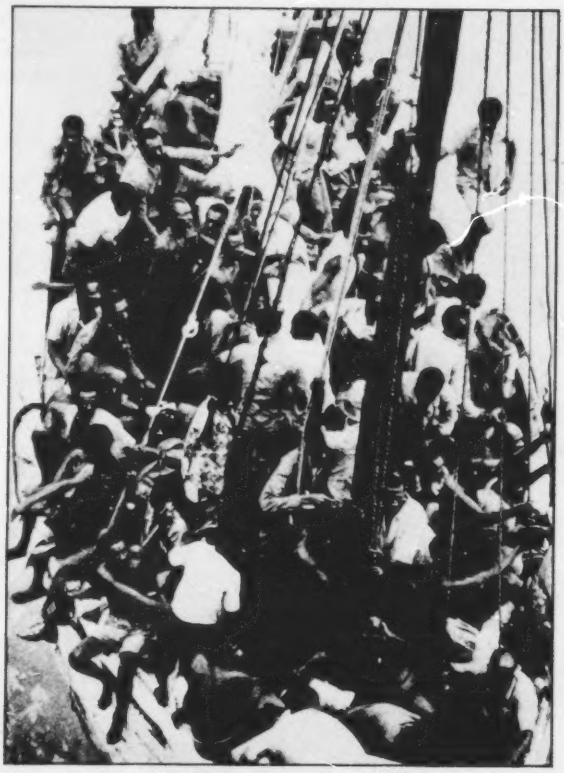
For all who live in the United States the phrase should be, "Here come the ships." They have been coming since this continent was discovered, some large, some mere cockleshells. Our harbors remain open, and the land stretches to receive the newcomers.

For all of us who are Christian, the ships must always come, and we must stand on the shores to welcome the strangers.

We have been doing that since 1975 for the many Indochinese refugees who have sought new lives in our society. Many still wait in crowded camps overseas, and we must continue to welcome them to our shores.

The arrival in 1980 of approximately 130,000 refugees from Cuba plus the presence of 30,000 Haitian refugees once again called upon the combined resources of Lutheran congregations, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and other voluntary resettlement agencies, and our government.

In May 1980 at the 14th annual meeting of the Lutheran Council in the USA, parent agency of LIRS, representatives of the American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches authorized the spending of up to $75,000 to get a Cuban-Haitian resettlement program going. The four churches later gave $275,000 for ongoing support, since the usual government funding to help with the initial resettlement of the refugees was not readily available. The Lutheran World Federation sent $70,000.



The council's annual meeting voted to "urge the judicatory units and congregations of the participating church bodies to respond expeditiously to the need of sponsorships . . . for the Cuban and Haitian refugees with the same compassion as they have traditionally displayed for other oppressed groups."

Since 1972, when Haitian refugees first started coming to the USA and were met with a cold shoulder, the Lutheran church bodies have periodically given financial aid to the Biscayne Boulevard Lutheran Church and Christian Community Service Agency in Miami, which were among those trying to help the refugees in their dilemma. Support has also gone to the Haitian Refugee Information Center. LIRS has attempted "to encourage a responsible national policy on asylum for the care and maintenance of people seeking a decision on their eligibility for refugee status." The agency has met regularly with government officials to discuss the Haitian situation.

Your receiving this manual, one of a series prepared by LIRS to introduce sponsors to various refugee groups, means you have agreed to help one or more Haitians or are seriously considering doing so.

Sponsorship involves a moral commitment to provide housing and jobs for the refugees and to reach out in friendship to give them the needed emotional support and orientation to life in the United States.

"introduction to the People and History of Haiti" attempts to describe superficially what life is like there and what customs and events have made the people who they are. Haitian refugees in the USA bring a culture uniquely their own, based on their history, and this is what the manual seeks to help you understand. The text was drafted by Margaret "Peg" Mangum, a free-lance writer and editor from New York City. Sources of photos include Religious News Service, the United Nations and a New York free-lance photographer, Victor Parker.

The manual was produced in cooperation with the Lutheran Council's Office of Communication and Interpretation. Costs were paid by a grant from the federal government.

CONTENTS

Entertaining Angels Unawares	1
Land of Mountains	3
Poorest of the Poor	5
Society's Split Personality	6
Superimposed and Popular Beliefs	7
Saint-Domingue	8
Ins and Outs of Independence	10
Papa Doc & Son	12
Bibliography	13

© 1981 Lutheran Council in the USA

Entertaining Angels Unawares

Haiti is a predominantly agricultural land. A proud people, Haitians face development problems that seem staggering. Most of them eke out a bare subsistence on tiny plots of eroded land. They are hampered by illiteracy and guided by superstition.

Haitians live in what, in effect, is a police state ruled as a dictatorship. Violations of human rights are widespread.

The present regime dates from 1957 when after a period of unrest and the rise and fall of a series of presidents, a black physician named François "Papa Doc" Duvalier was elected to head the government. He took firm control with the help of a private police force, the *Tontons Macoute*, which terrorized the population. He established an infamous policy of torturing political opponents and placing citizens in prison without trials or hearings. He saw that the constitution was amended to make him president-for-life. In 1971 while dying, he passed the title and his repressive regime on to his son Jean-Claude.

The first Haitians to seek freedom in the United States ventured across 800 miles of ocean in a flimsy boat in December 1972. An estimated 35,000 have followed through the years. Many have become part of the undocumented alien population. Others have waited in a "legal limbo" while seeking status as political refugees.

In an editorial published immediately after the initial boatload of Haitian refugees stepped on U.S. soil, the Miami News stated prophetically: "A moment of truth has arrived for our local immigration officials who so casually go about their almost daily task of processing Cuban citizens landing in South Florida after having escaped the Castro regime. Should the procedure be any different for the dark-skinned Haitians? The action taken on this case will be watched by people across the country and even around the world . . . . To refuse the pending request of the dark-skinned Haitians would be racism, and surely our government isn't racist—or is it?"

Demonstrators protest U.S. policies toward Haiti.

Federal policy held that the Haitians could not be classified as political refugees, that they had come to the U.S. for economic reasons. The policy seemingly viewed Haiti as a needed ally in the Caribbean and that accepting those who fled would offend the Duvalier regime.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service has sought to deport the Haitians, holding many of them in jail before flying them back to their island home where they faced almost certain punishment or death. The Haitians expected a welcome. Instead they found themselves interned in a maze of bureaucratic procedures that many could not comprehend. Their hopes were met with bitter disappointment.

The Haitians have not been without friends. A variety of groups and individuals have sought to plead their cause and provide them with supportive services. Black members of the U.S. House of Representatives have formed a congressional task force on Haitian refugees chaired by Rep. Shirley Chisholm of New York.

In the nation's religious community, the National Council of Churches has played a leading role in helping the Haitians. The NCC's governing board charged in 1974 that "the treatment accorded black Haitian refugees stands in tragic contrast to the generous United States government provisions for Cuban refugees who are, except for a few, white and skilled; which by implication seems to be saying that our doors are open only to those who are white, skilled and fleeing from socialist governments, thereby sowing seeds of racial strife in Florida and elsewhere, and appearing by design or default a champion of dictatorship of the right, no matter how repressive it might be."

Legal services provided by the NCC-established Haitian Refugee Center in Miami led to a hopeful court ruling in July 1980 by U.S. District Court Judge James L. King. The case centered on 4,000 Haitians who sought political asylum from August 1978 to May 1979.

Haitian refugees wait in jail.

Judge King concluded that the Haitians had been denied due process of law and were victims of "systematic and pervasive" discrimination by immigration authorities. "It must stop," he declared, ruling that the manner in which the Immigration and Naturalization Service had treated the Haitians "violated the Constitution, the immigration statutes, international agreements, INS regulations and INS operating procedures."

King found uncontroverted evidence of a "transparently discriminatory program designed to deport Haitian nationals and no one else." The asylum applicants were each allowed an average of "only 15 minutes of substantive exchange." They were required to concede deportability before being permitted to apply for asylum. The procedure was "roughly the equivalent of requiring a criminal defendant to concede his guilt before providing him any constitutional or statutory rights," the judge commented.

The director of studies at a Quaker foundation at Wallingford, Pa., Parker J. Palmer, believes that "the Church's most important mission in the years ahead is to help us recover the vision of human unity, the sense that we are not only one nation but one humanity under God." He suggests "extending hospitality to strangers" as one way the Church and its members can carry out this healing mission.

Theologian Henri Nouwen defines hospitality as "the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter . . . . Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity for others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his or her own."

Sponsors of Haitian refugees are extending hospitality as defined by Nouwen to these boat people. The newcomers may not be able to analyze all the reasons for their flight in fragile boats. But with the help of congregations, they will be able to abolish the intangible factors that have kept them in bondage for so long and begin to realize their dream of freedom.

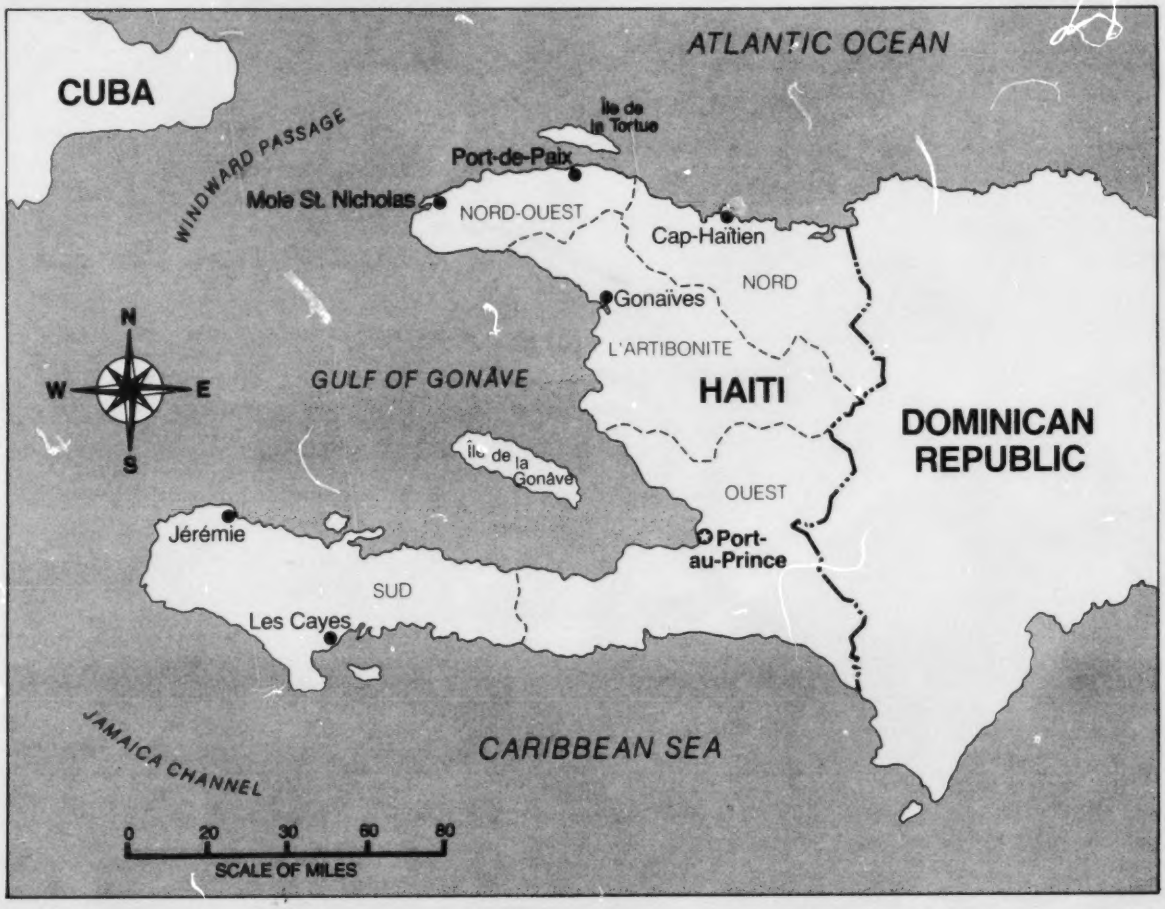
In the last chapter of his letter to the Hebrews the Apostle Paul urges, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Sponsors may find that they will receive such special gifts through the experience of refugee resettlement.

Land of Mountains

The Indian name for Haiti means "mountains," and indeed the Republic of Haiti occupies the western one-third of one of the most mountainous islands in the Caribbean, Hispaniola. The eastern two-thirds comprises the Dominican Republic. The boundary between the two countries is 193 miles long. Hispaniola lies 1,365 miles due south of New York City.

To the north of Haiti is the Atlantic Ocean, to the northwest is the Windward Passage separating it from Cuba 50 miles away, and to the south is the Caribbean Sea. Among Haiti's larger offshore islands are La Gonâve, which is about 40 miles northwest of the capital city, Port-au-Prince, and Tortue, or "Turtle Island." In the 17th century Tortue was the haunt of French buccaneers who first colonized the western part of Hispaniola. Along the extensive coastline are mangrove swamps and tidal mud flats.

Haiti's chalky mountains are not high, rising an average of 3,000 feet. They are divided into separate northern and southern ranges which in turn form the northern and southern peninsulas giving the country its distinctive horseshoe shape. A few rain forests remain where mahogany, rosewood and other precious hardwoods grow. Otherwise the mountain timber has given way to the critical need



3

Housewife displays fruit raised on her family's plot.

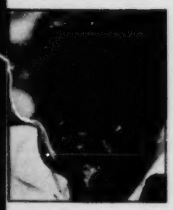
for cultivable land. Serious erosion has resulted.

Two-thirds of the total land area of 10,714 square miles is nonproductive. Three plains—Plaine du Nord, Cul-de-Sac and Leogane—extend over 430 square miles. Near the Dominican frontier are several large salt lakes. The plains also suffer from erosion. Parts of them are desert-like with "forests" of cacti, some of which reach heights of 15 feet.

The low-lying mountain peaks cause the tradewinds to dump much of their burden of moisture before it reaches the plains. Different locations experience considerable variations in the amount of rainfall. At Mole St. Nicholas in the northwest it is only about 20 inches per year, while some highland areas receive over 100 inches. Hurricanes may occur between August and November, traveling from south to north.

Haiti lies near the northern limit of the tropical zone. Temperatures vary little through the seasons. Port-au-Prince, at sea level, has an average annual temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Frosts occur from time to time at high altitudes.

Animal life is not known to include poisonous snakes or wild mammals large enough to be dangerous to the population. Insects abound, as do 200 species of birds and 270 species of fish in the coastal waters.



Poorest of the Poor

Haiti is about the size of the state of Maryland. In that small territory live nearly five million people, or 443 persons for each square mile. More than 85 per cent of the work force is involved in agriculture and fishing.

Except for the capital of Port-au-Prince with its 700,000 citizens, Haiti's other cities, such as Cap-Haïtien, Gonaïves, Les Cayes, Jérémie and Port-de-Paix, are really overgrown towns. The elite are concentrated in the cities, all seaports, where foreign goods and the money to purchase them are available.

The countryside is marked not by villages but by scattered settlements of families. Each settlement is enclosed within mud-daubed wattle walls. The houses and shanties have wood frames and thatched roofs or, if the inhabitants are prosperous, roofs made of corrugated iron sheets.

Forty-two per cent of Haiti's population is under 15, and life expectancy is 49 years for men and 51 for women. Nevertheless, the nation claims more men than women. The infant mortality rate is 15 per cent.

Education is "free and compulsory," but the literacy rate is only 10 per cent. Of the two million children under 15, approximately 600,000 attend public elementary schools taught by 12,000 teachers. Slightly fewer than 60,000 attend secondary schools which have 3,300 teachers. Slightly more than 10,000 are enrolled in vocational or other institutions of higher learning, with the ratio in these schools being five students to each teacher. The single university is located at Port-au-Prince.

Per-capita income for Haitians is about $250 annually. This makes the country the poorest in the Western Hemisphere.

Crowded Haitian settlement

For themselves and for the local markets, the peasants grow maize, sweet potatoes, manioc, papaya, avocados, taro, mango, sesame and sugarcane. They raise some cattle, swine and fowl and supplement their diets with fish.

Coffee, cultivated on the slopes of all mountains, is by far the most important commercial crop. The second major source of income is tourism, with about 100,000 annual visitors. Other items in the export category are sisal, cocoa, sugarcane, cotton, bananas, tobacco and rice. The United States is Haiti's principal trading partner, buying nearly 75 per cent of exports.

Bauxite is mined for aluminum. Other resources are copper, gold, silver, cement and timber. Unfortunately most of these resources are too limited in quantity for commercial exploitation.

Haiti is the largest baseball producing country in the world. Ironically, hides for the balls are imported, and baseball is not played by Haitians. Almost all mills and factories are foreign owned, and most of their workers are women.

Since few manufactured goods can be found in village markets, the peasants produce what they need themselves. They work the fields by hand with hoes, billhooks and dibbles. They are apt as smiths, charcoal burners and leather workers. A few cabinetmakers craft simple furniture.

Cow horn or tortoiseshell is made into combs, bones into buttons, and grasses and bamboo into fish traps and baskets. From wood are shaped bowls, mortars and pestles, spoons and tool handles. Tin cans are transformed into pots and pans, old tires and inner tubes into sandals. On market days customers can purchase mattresses filled with grass or pots made from clay.

The number of vehicles in the republic indicates how few earn enough to own them. In 1974, 15,700 passenger cars were in use along with 1,500 commercial vehicles. The country has only 2,000 miles of roads, many of which deteriorate rapidly in the rainy season, and 185 miles of railroads. The two train lines carry mostly freight.

The number of television sets in use in 1975 was 13,000. The number of telephones installed in homes and businesses in 1977 was 17,800.

Haiti's currency is called the gourde. Five gourdes equal one U.S. dollar. A recent national budget was 387 million gourdes, or $77 million.

Society's Split Personality

Haitian society is divided into two distinct parts: the light-skinned elite, who make up only five per cent of the population and cluster in the cities; and the black rural peasants, who are of African ancestry and comprise the vast majority. Officially all Haitians are considered equal, regardless of race. Population reports are barred from discussing racial divisions.

The elite are the government officials, merchants, lawyers and doctors. In sharp contrast to the rest of Latin America, they are not a landed aristocracy. The elite have their clubs, tennis courts, walled gardens and country estates, but their wealth cannot be measured in the same terms as in the United States.

Those in teaching and the church are sometimes included among the elite, but they do not have the same prestige as the groups above. Of paramount importance is the unspoken dictum that the elite never engage in manual work.

The elite speak French, Haiti's official language, and also understand the dialect known as Creole. The peasants speak nothing but Creole, a rich mix of 17th-century French and African expressions. It emerged as a means of communication between the French colonialists and the black slaves brought from the Dahomey or Congo tribes in West Africa.

The use of Creole has played a role in maintaining the chasm between the elite and peasants and in keeping the peasants isolated and illiterate. Efforts to make Creole the sole vehicle of primary education have not succeeded. Peasant children must contend with lessons taught in French, which for them is a half-foreign language.

Lack of a chance even for an elementary education has bred conservative attitudes among the peasants and helped preserve their superstitious beliefs. Ignorance and poverty combine in a never ending cycle from which few escape. The upward mobility that occurs takes generations. But even when rural peasants gain an education and money and settle into urban life, they are rarely seen at social gatherings.

One of the everyday symbols that personifies the peasants' dilemma is the importance to them of shoes. Shoes signify success and affluence. If a person owns a pair of shoes, they are worn when he or she goes to town.

The elite send their sons to private primary and secondary schools and to colleges overseas. Formal education is conducted separately for women, whose lives center in the home. The few women who move into public life are either teachers or clerical workers in the government.

Peasant men usually avoid the towns and cities because of lingering fear from two centuries ago when they were often impressed into military service. Instead the peasant women, who are known for their energy and work habits, walk down the hills with their produce on their heads to sell on market days.

Because of their heritage as slaves, the peasants place special significance on owning small plots of land. The land offers sustenance and stability and is "good" in and of itself. The peasants' ancestors are buried in the land, and the voodoo "gods" live there.

Health conditions of the peasants are primitive. Deaths from malaria, yaws, hookworm, elephantiasis and tuberculosis are common.

The peasants endure their hardships stoically. Most are honest, polite, cheerful and kind. If they can, they entertain lavishly. Their main recreational diversions are cockfights and storytelling, a national pastime. The traditional password and response exchanged between storyteller and listeners at the beginning of a tale is *"cric-crac."* Dancing on Saturday nights to the beat of drums is also universal and grows out of the folk religion, voodoo.

Marriage for the elite takes place under Roman Catholic rites. Men often have mistresses. Divorce is uncommon. Common-law marriages and even polygamous relationships are frequent among the peasants.

An area of Haitian life which is losing its split personality is the arts. "Sophisticated" and "primitive" or "French" and "African" are applied less and less to the works of national artists, dance troops which have gained international acclaim and a Creole theater established several decades ago. Instead they are accepted simply as "Haitian."

The Episcopal Cathedral St. Trinité, decorated by eight "old masters" of Haitian popular art, has become a tourist attraction second only to King Henry Christophe's mountaintop citadel, a stupendous architectural and engineering achievement.

Luggage goes on top of this Haitian bus.

Superimposed and Popular Beliefs

Haitians, according to a saying, are 90 per cent Roman Catholic and 100 per cent voodoo. The French superimposed Catholicism on the country, while voodoo is a traditional popular belief.

In colonial times the French Church considered Haiti a missionary country. Clergy were sent from France, and the few Haitians who chose a church vocation were trained in the old world. French priests and friars established Carmelite, Capuchin, Dominican and Jesuit orders on the island. A few courageous clergy spoke out against the colonialists' treatment of the slaves. During the slave revolt of 1791 which resulted in a free Haiti, five Jesuits acted as chaplains to the blacks. The undisputed leader of the slaves, Toussaint L'Ouverture, was not religious himself but believed that the Roman Catholic Church provided a stable influence on society. He encouraged church activities.

The first imperial ruler of Haiti, Jean Jacques Dessalines, separated church and state, declared marriage a civil rather than a religious ceremony and permitted divorce. Following his assassination and the division of Haiti into two kingdoms, the benevolent ruler of the south, Alexandre Pétion, let in the first Protestant missionaries, Wesleyan Methodists from Great Britain. The ruler who brought Haiti back together, Jean Pierre Boyer, considered the Catholic Church corrupt, ousted the French clergy and declared himself head of the church.

Voodoo ceremony

In 1860, when Haiti was once again a republic, a relationship was reestablished with the Vatican. An all-French clergy returned to adminster the sacraments, say mass and serve the religious needs of the people. Not until 1953 did a black Haitian become a bishop, due in part to the church's impact being limited to the urban elite. In the 1960's the Duvalier regime resumed the expulsion of all foreign-born clergy. The one Catholic seminary now has an average of 60 graduates per year.

Haiti has never had enough priests to reach the bulk of the population in the countryside. Also, conceptual thinking and theological thought processes have been beyond the reality of the illiterate peasants. While baptized as Catholics, most peasants practice a "folk religion" which has superimposed Christian symbols and saints onto their African heritage and tradition.

Voudun, known as voodoo to Americans, is basically an animistic cult which has a pantheon of lesser "gods" who control elements in nature and who must be propitiated in order for the land to accept, protect and provide for the individual worshipers. Christian ideas of monotheism, sin and moral law, all based on a rational system of thought and self-restraint, are absent from voodoo. It involves action and participation. Public dancing is a major component. Private services include sacrifices to the lesser "gods" and traditionally precede the dancing.

Parallel to the practice of voodoo but not actually part of the religion is a prevalent belief in magic and sorcery. North Americans often fail to differentiate between the magical and religious practices and call both "voodoo."

As in other folk cultures that preceded the arrival of Christianity and Western customs, Haitian peasants believe in spirits and spells that cause or prevent evil from visiting an individual. For a people in thrall to such a system of beliefs, the *Tontons Macoute* of "Papa Doc" Duvalier and other groups can easily rule through fear and terror as much as through physical persuasion or torture. "Papa Doc," according to reports, dressed at times as the Baron Samedi, a voodoo deity thought to be the keeper of tombs and cemeteries and therefore with influence over the dreaded spirits who might return harmfully.

Statistics vary between 550,000 and 885,000 as to the number of Haitians today who claim to be other than Roman Catholics. The Episcopal Church is particularly influential in both the cities and countryside as well as progressive in terms of social work, higher education and encouragement of native arts. Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist and Church of God congregations can also be found. The Protestants operate 12 schools and seminaries.

Saint-Domingue

On December 6, 1492, Christopher Columbus took shelter at Mole St. Nicholas on the northwestern tip of the island he called Hispaniola. The name honored the country which sponsored his explorations.

Within a century the few Spaniards who settled primarily on the eastern shore had killed off the indigenous Arawak Indian population. The Indians were worked to death, slaughtered outright and victimized by foreign diseases and interbreeding.

Sailing from their base in the Cayman Islands to the northwest and the closer Tortue Island, French pirates used to come to the largely uninhabited western section of Hispaniola to hunt wild cattle. In time they established plantations there. In 1664 the French West India Company took possession of the newly founded town of Port-de-Paix. In 1697 Spain formally ceded the western third of the island to the French, who named it Saint-Domingue.

The French foothold quickly expanded in the 18th century with the labor of African slaves and irrigation of the semiarid plains. A handful of planters grew rich on the production and export of indigo, sugarcane, sisal, coffee and cotton. By the 1780's two-thirds of the wealth France derived from its colonial empire came from tiny Saint-Domingue. Its population had grown to 556,000, made up of only 32,000 whites, 24,000 free blacks and 500,000 slaves.

Saint-Domingue's society in those days forecast its future culture as well as its future problems. At the top of the pyramid were the *grands blancs*, the French people of wealth. Beneath them were the *petits blancs*, whites whose economic resources were more limited. In a separate category were the *gens de couleur*, free people with African blood who were insured full citizenship by the *Code Noir* decreed by Louis XIV. At the bottom were the many black slaves. They were often freed by the plantation owners for faithful service and being a beloved mistress or a parent.

Sugarcane harvesters

Village signs underscore French heritage.

Many of the *gens de couleur* were descendents of the aristocracy, who educated and provided generously for their partly white offspring. The status they gained was resented by the *petits blancs*, who developed racist rules and customs. The poorer whites forced the colored class to wear different clothing from the rest of the population, submit to a curfew and sit in separate sections of churches. They managed to bar them from the national assembly.

The French Revolution, with its destruction of the ruling aristocrats and its cry for freedom and equality, brought further tension to Saint-Domingue. Two years after the revolution's beginning in 1789, the slaves acted against such atrocities as being buried alive, thrown into boiling caldrons of cane syrup and being consigned to man-eating dogs.

Leader of the revolt was a slave named Boukman, who had risen to the rank of overseer. On

the eve of the uprising he delivered the following invocation, which has the ring of a psalm—although Boukman was not a Christian and was probably illiterate:

"Good Lord who hath made the sun that shines upon us,
That riseth from the sea,
Who maketh the storm to roar, and governeth the thunders,
The Lord is hidden in the heavens,
And there he watcheth over us.
The Lord seeth what the blancs have done.
Their god commandeth crimes,
Ours giveth blessings upon us.

The good Lord hath ordained vengeance
He will give strength to our arms and courage to our hearts.
He shall sustain us.
Cast down the image of the god of the blancs,
Because he maketh the tears to flow from our eyes.
Hearken unto liberty
That speaketh now in all our hearts."

The uprising started under the guise of a voodoo ceremony in the woods of a plantation. Drum messages passed the word to slaves on other plantations. They massacred their white masters, pillaged buildings and burned fields. White survivors fled to the towns.

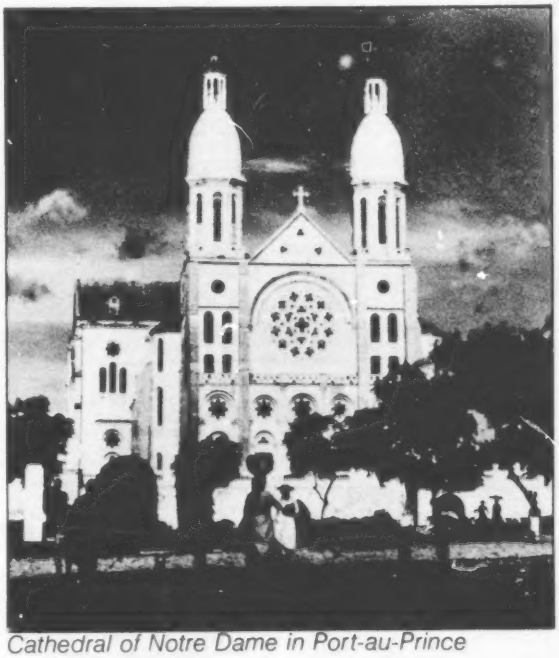
In order to continue holding the island as a colony, the French abolished slavery by a decree issued February 4, 1794. The ex-slaves and *gens de couleur* united to insure their security in the face of widespread economic disorganization, social chaos and civil war. In 1795 Spain ceded the eastern part of the island to France.

A black general, Toussaint L'Ouverture, emerged as a national leader and folk hero. Small, frail and ugly, Toussaint was an ex-slave educated abroad, who served first with the Spanish and then in the French army. He apparently did not take part in the slave uprising of 1791 but is said to have helped his former master escape to the United States. Afire with the spirit of the French Revolution, he wrote: "I desire the establishment of liberty and equality in Saint-Domingue. I strive to bring them into being."

Toussaint attempted to restore the economy in the territory he controlled by forcing the freed blacks back to work the land. He also began a campaign to free all of Hispaniola. By 1801 he had captured Santo Domingo, capital of the former Spanish colony.

Back in France the little Corsican, Napoleon Bonaparte, had gained control and with meteoric speed carved out his empire. Saint-Domingue was a particular concern. In 1802 Napoleon sent 25,000 troops and 70 warships under his brother-in-law, General Charles Leclerc, to subdue Toussaint. The resistance of Toussaint's army commanded by another black general, Henry Christophe, was short-lived. The local troops fled to the mountains. The French burned Port-au-Prince and captured the folk hero. He was taken to France, where he died in a dungeon a year later.

Leclerc's forces were decimated by tropical fever, attacked by black guerrillas and menaced by the British navy. Within months Leclerc himself was dead. The island's economy was entirely ruined. Toward the end of 1803 Napoleon left the former pride of New France to fend for itself. Another black general, Jean Jacques Dessalines, gained control and proclaimed the entire island independent on January 1, 1804. He restored its original Arawak name, Haiti.



Cathedral of Notre Dame in Port-au-Prince

Ins and Outs of Independence

Emulating Napoleon, Dessalines had himself proclaimed Emperor Jacques I in October 1804. He believed in the importance of the state over the individual. "Freedom" to him meant freedom from France and extermination of French whites. With a tyrannical hand and with the army to enforce his decrees, he devised a system in which neither color nor money had meaning. Social distinctions were based on divisions in laboring tasks. Under him land was controlled by the state and divided among the people, the roots of Haiti's peasant life today.

Like Toussaint, Dessalines had to decree forced labor in an attempt to restore the economy. The ensuing resentment led to his assassination in 1806, continuing civil war, the emergence of a northern state ruled by General Christophe as Henri I and a southern state controlled by the mulattoes under General Alexandre Pétion as president-for-life. In 1808 with British help, Spain regained control of the eastern end of the island.

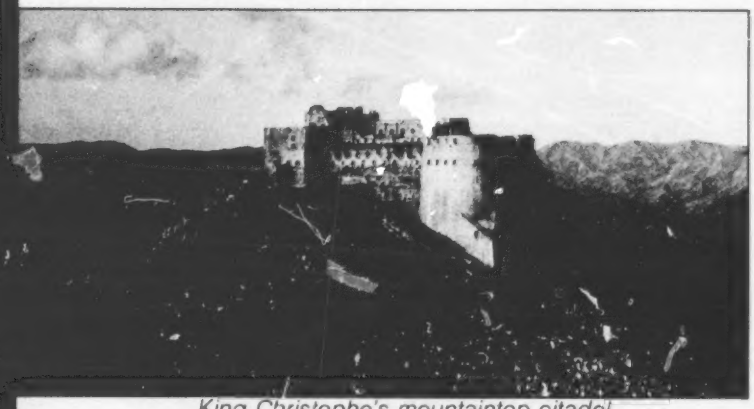
Christophe was a benevolent despot who built a feudal society and brought back some prosperity and tranquillity. He installed a rigid work schedule for the people, ruled by bells. He attempted to instill moral precepts like honesty, and adopted British agricultural methods. Despite these positive developments, Christophe was also an egotist who constructed a spectacular palace, San Souci, and an imposing fortress, the Citadelle Laferriere, both at Cap-Haïtien. There with mutinous soldiers almost at his door, he committed suicide in 1820.

Meanwhile in the south, Pétion proved a philosophical, gentle ruler who broke the hold of the aristocrats and moderated the color problem. He attempted to found an educational system and to rule constitutionally. But his economic programs were a disaster. He deeded small landholdings to the peasants and abolished the land tax in a complete laissez-faire policy based on his interpretation of Adam Smith's economic theories. He granted government subsidies to large landholders and instituted a tenant farm system similar to the former sharecropping in the South of the USA.

After Pétion's death in 1818, another mulatto, Jean Pierre Boyer, took over the south and two years later, with Christophe also dead, all of Haiti. He was probably the most enlightened ruler in its history, uniting the country by persuasion and not force. He instituted a "Code Rural" in an effort to reform the agricultural system. Unfortunately the division that exists today between the government and peasants at the local level was in effect in the early 1800's, and the peasantry largely ignored Boyer's directives.

To the east, Santo Domingo proclaimed its independence from Spain in 1821. The new state requested a treaty of friendship with Haiti, but Haiti's response was a successful invasion and occupation. Santo Domingo finally regained its independence in a popular uprising in 1844, the year after

10 *National palace in Port-au-Prince*



King Christophe's mountaintop citadel

Boyer was overthrown.

France had recognized Haiti as an independent country in 1825. The price was an exorbitant indemnity to pay the losses of French planters. Trying to deal with this obligation led to further debts and defaults, political anarchy and personal tyrannies. The tiny nation struggled in virtual isolation from the rest of the world.

Between 1843 and 1915, 22 heads of state followed one another in quick succession. Only one president served out a full term. The last one during the period, another tyrannical leader named Guillaume Sam, was literally torn to pieces by a mob. Constitutions were adopted and then rewritten. Revolution after revolution took place.

By the beginning of the 20th century, business interests from the United States had gained a foothold in Haiti. In 1905 the U.S. moved to take Haiti's customs into receivership and bring about reforms. A decade later the U.S. Marines landed to begin an occupation which lasted until 1934. The action was justified on the grounds of humanitarian intervention and under the Monroe Doctrine, but many Haitians believed the marines were there to protect approaches to the Panama Canal.

U.S. control was basically at governmental and economic levels. In 1918 the occupiers supervised adoption of another new constitution written by Franklin D. Roosevelt, then assistant secretary of the Navy. It allowed foreigners to own land in Haiti after over a century of being banned from such ownership. The U.S. backed Haitian leaders of lighter complexion, the class which holds the reigns of government and wealth in the country today.

Throughout this period, bloody border disputes continued between Haiti and what was now called the Dominican Republic to the east. The Dominicans, with their Spanish culture and greater admixture of European blood, looked with disfavor and fear upon the black Haitians, with their "inferior" African culture and lower standard of living. A 1937 massacre of thousands of Haitians near the border eventually drew a promise from the Dominican Republic of compensation for the relatives who were slain, but little recompense ever reached Haiti.

Despite U.S. control and the establishment of a variety of development programs, president followed president in much the past pattern, with fraud accompanying most elections. The constitution was often altered to suit the leader or ignored. With the promise to put political and economic power into the hands of the black masses, François Duvalier, a physician formerly employed by a U.S. medical aid program and a student of voodoo was elected president in 1957. He put in place the present personal dictatorship.

Papa Doc & Son

"Papa Doc" Duvalier immediately dismissed and exiled most of the leaders of the army. He established his power through the strong-armed gang called the *Tontons Macoute*. In local parlance the name means "bogeyman." Indeed this vigilante group has utilized fear and terror to control the population. It supposedly receives up to one-third of the national budget and gives Haiti its fascist overtones.

Another of Duvalier's initial actions was to engineer an alliance with General Rafael Trujillo, dictator of the Dominican Republic. They both wanted to protect themselves from the kind of uprisings which brought Fidel Castro to power in Cuba in 1959. The alliance was short-lived. In the early 1960's Duvalier again sealed the border. He aimed to keep infiltrators out of Haiti and prevent Haitians from leaving.

In his attempts to rebuild Haiti's badly weakened economy, Papa Doc received considerable help from the United States. He played upon U.S. fears of a communist Cuba and what could result from a power vacuum in Haiti. U.S. aid centered on building a dam on the Artibonite River to provide water for irrigation and electrical power and on attacking malnutrition and disease in a once-fertile area of northern Haiti.

Haiti's government under Papa Doc until his death in 1971 at age 64 and since under his son Jean-Claude is directed from a residence much like the U.S. White House in Port-au-Prince. Papa Doc had consolidated the former bicameral legislature into one house. The assembly's 58 deputies are all members of the one official party and are completely subordinate to the president-for-life, who rules by decree.

The national territory is divided into five *départements*, each with a capital. The *départements* are divided into approximately 100 communes. Each commune is divided into five or six rural districts, each supervised by a *chef de section* appointed by a local military captain.

No elections take place. No opposing political parties exist. Potential political opponents find themselves in jail. Justice differs for upper and lower class offenders. The majority of people who reside in rural areas have no avenue by which to influence national policy.

Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier was only 19 when he assumed power. Few believed he could last long. His sister, Marie-Denise Duvalier Dominique, has repeatedly tried to wrest power from her brother by encouraging discontent among the military establishment. Baby Doc has suppressed both the local and international press by intimidation. In a 1979 law he made criticism or "disrespect" of the president-for-life, his mother, his father's memory or Haitian culture a serious offense.

Jean-Claude's rule has been less violent than his father's. As a result, foreign investment and tourism have revived. But a severe drought in 1975-77 brought famine, aggravated by erosion caused by the destruction of most trees.

The International Red Cross has been forbidden access to Haitian prisons to check on continuing reports of human rights violations. A report from Amnesty International indicates that "Haiti's prisons are still filled with people who have spent many years in detention without ever being charged or brought to trial. Amnesty International remains seriously concerned with the continued repression of dissent in Haiti and the denial of human and legal rights . . . . The variety of torture to which the detainee is subjected is incredible: clubbing to death, maiming of the genitals, food deprivation to the point of starvation, and the insertion of red hot pokers into the back passages . . . . In fact, these prisons are death traps (and) find a parallel with the Nazi concentration camps of the past but have no present-day equivalent."

No wonder thousands of Haitians have taken the only course they see open to them—to risk their lives on the 800-mile trip in small boats on the open seas to the shores of the USA and the dream of a new free life.

Papa Doc

Baby Doc

Bibliography

*Dane Chandos, *The Trade Wind Islands* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955)

*Richard D. Crassweller, "Darkness in Haiti," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1971, pp. 315-330.

*John Edwin Fagg, *Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 113-117.

"Haitians: America's Boat People," entire issue of *Migration Today*, Vol. 7, No. 4, September 1979.

Robert Debs Heinl Jr. and Nancy Gordon Heinl, *Written in Blood: A Story of the Haitian People 1492-1971* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978).

*James G. Leyburn, *The Haitian People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

*O. Ernest Moore, *Haiti: Its Stagnant Society and Shackled Economy* (New York: Exposition Press, 1950).

*available only in libraries